



Set Goals for Your Road to Success

As 2009 draws to an end, while some people engage in reflective thoughts about the past year's accomplishments, the New Year's goals, resolutions, plans, dreams, and directions, others seem oblivious to any of these. This article looks at goals and why they are important tools for personal fulfilment.

PHOTOS: DT



By Vanessa Katte

WHAT is it about this annual “new” that causes us to pause and reflect upon our lives and accomplishments? Each of us has a natural desire to grow and contribute to the world in ways that are fulfilling and enriching. I once read that all that people want from life can be summarised into four things: to love, to live, to learn, and to leave a legacy.

Thus, each New Year presents us with the opportunity to draw a line in the sand and claim a new starting point for a new chapter. Every year, we can promise to strive for betterment, fulfilment, and success.

Yet, for all the initial enthusiasm, keeping ourselves motivated, committed, and progressing into the directions of our dreams is often tough. All too quickly we succumb to old habits, daily routines, and allow life once more to speed by, leaving little room for any steps towards proclaimed resolutions. By the year end, we are back to normal, planning for the “new” cycle of positive change.

Why is it so difficult to stay on track? What keeps us from getting closer to our dreams? What can we do to turn hopes into achievements?

One part of the answer to these questions has to do with goals, the very things that people declare as their “wants” for the coming weeks, months, and years. Many people are aware that goal-setting is an effective success technique. Yet, research confirms that only 6 per cent of all people take the time to write down their goals, that leaves 94 per cent without clear goals.

I have to admit I was one of them, feeling restricted by the mere thought of having to commit myself to something in writing. I thought living life is commitment enough. It only changed when I started to work with organisations and realised that if there wouldn't be clear goals and directions for the company, chaos would reign and nothing of worth would ever be accomplished.

In my experience, many people may be good at setting goals in the business

environment, but they fall short of doing so in areas of their own lives which may explain the imbalances and dissatisfaction they feel in their lives.

As you start to ponder about what it is that you want to achieve in the coming year, keep in mind a few principles for effective goal-setting.

Gaining clarity on goals

One issue people face when deliberating what they want to achieve is specificity. As studies have repeatedly shown, the more specific you are about what you really want, the likelier it is that you will get it.

“I want to buy a new house” will not do it. Much more specific and powerful is: “By 2012, I want to live with my family in a colonial bungalow with four spacious bedrooms, luxurious living room, with a swimming pool and hardwood floors and easy access to amenities”.

Being specific includes a number of questions we have to ask ourselves around that goal:

- **Positive:** What do I want? Not what I do not want (what we focus on expands, hence goals are always positive statements)
- **Context:** When, where, and with whom do I want to achieve that goal?
- **Motivation:** What will achieving this goal do for me? What is so important for me about achieving this outcome?
- **Control:** Can I achieve this goal no matter what other people do?
- **Evidence:** How will I know when I have achieved the goal? How do I know that I am progressing towards that goal?

Clarity also means writing the goal down, placing it somewhere where it reminds daily that this is what you want to achieve. It is about making the goal visible and tangible to create a subconscious pathway of attracting the right resources and means to allow the goal to manifest.

Another aspect to entrench the goal subconsciously is visualisation. This allows people to draw a mental picture of the goal and emotionally connect with it.

Anchoring goals

This means two things: connecting goals to a larger vision and direction of life; as well as grounding the goals in values, the things that are most important to us.

The longer the list of reasons of why we want to achieve that goal, the more motivated we will become towards attaining it. These reasons are often linked to a governing value.

Going back to the “house” example, the personal value of wanting such a house could be “status and refinement” while additional motivational reasons include being able to invite business associates, enjoy the luxurious living, and providing your family with a better way of life. If goals are congruent with values, goal achievement gets much easier.

The other driver that keeps people motivated is how well the set goal is aligned to their general life direction and identity. Life direction refers to “where do I ultimately want to go to” while identity answers “who am I or who do I really want to be”.

If the set goal has no connection to the above questions, something is missing and any motivation will be short-lived. Goethe wrote: “First build a proper goal. That proper goal will make it easy, almost automatic, to build a proper you.”

While we can choose to build our goals bottom-up (environment, skills, behaviours), if they connect with our top-down (values, beliefs, identity) levels of being, the drive for accomplishment is stronger.

Translating goals into actions

After being specific about our goals, having written them down, visualising them regularly and knowing how they fit in with our values and long-term directions, what must be done to translate them into reality?

This requires strategies and actions and a “line of sight” between what we want, what we do, and what we achieve. This is where many often get stuck and

procrastinate.

Some people may be good at planning, but poor in executing these plans. Others lack a clear plan and keep themselves busy "doing" with limited success. Such challenges have many shades: including limiting beliefs ("I am not good enough"), negative emotions such as fear, lack of planning, and poor prioritisation of efforts, perceived lack of support, and more.

Ultimately such issues can be attributed to:

- Misalignment between the goal and values
- Lack of skills and competencies to achieve the goal
- Unconscious blocks and habits from past experiences that keep people stuck
- Limited thinking
- Not capitalising on the Body-Mind connection, and
- Not actively reflecting where we stand and what can be done to move forward.

Knowing the root cause of these challenges can help, but it is more impactful to re-focus and re-connect with our goal and apply the following principles.

Starting small: Often the most difficult thing is to get started. The bigger your goal, the more overwhelming it seems to find a beginning. But as the Chinese proverb goes: "Every journey begins with a single step".

The trick is make each step a relatively small manageable task like making

a phone call, reading an article, or going for that presentation. While the goals may be big, the tasks to achieve them can be small.

Tuning in: When all efforts grind to a halt, it makes sense to take a quiet moment to understand what is really going on. Often, people find there is a limiting thought or expectation blocking them. It could also turn out that while they have committed to the goal, they have also found other things to be more important to them. Whatever is going on, they should listen to their hearts and inner voices without being afraid of making changes to their original goals.

Believing: "Believe it until we see it" is the guiding principle in achieving goals. A positive belief is a cornerstone of faith and is an energised thought about the situation that sets the blueprint for what is attainable. It also marks the boundaries of what people think is possible.

Belief in combination with desire (motivation driven by values), expectancy (recognising that the goal is already a reality in the subjective mind, hence the importance of visualisation), and persistence (seeing it through, not giving up, long-term perspective; waiting till the time is right) is what creates faith. The greater our faith, the higher our chances of success.

Tracking progress: One way of ensuring that we do not lose sight of what has been accomplished is documenting our efforts. This is motivating since we

have to write down what we have actually done to reach our goals and trains reflective thinking skills. Taking 10 to 15 minutes each day to write down what has been done, even the smallest things, can make a difference.

Celebrating successes: High achievers frequently may forget this part. It is about pausing, taking a step back, acknowledging oneself and feeling gratitude about the achieved goal and the process getting there.

Thus, in summary:

- Be specific about your goals
- Write them down and make them visible
- Visualise and emotionally connect with your goals (five to 10 minutes) a day
- Know how your goals connect to your values and overall directions in life
- Start small—break down goals into daily increments
- Believe—be absolutely convinced that you can and will reach your goal
- Tune in and understand what is really going on; formulate a plan to overcome obstacles
- Check your progress, use a success journal
- Get support from family, friends, or a professional coach if it gets tough, and
- Celebrate successes—acknowledge results and be grateful.

As a coach, I spend a lot of time clarifying goals with clients. Every coaching session starts with the question of what the client wants to get from the session and how that connects to the larger goal they want to accomplish. Only when we are clear about what we really want, can we move forward towards building commitment, resources, strategies, and actions to make it happen.

Every year is another opportunity to become who you really want to be. Set aside some time this year to take a step back, reflect, and plan ahead—keeping the goal-setting principles in mind. As George Eliot said: "It's never too late to be who you might have been." ✂



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